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Tobacco Truancy

Next time you gripe about the excessive number of days employees are "out sick," think of this: one reason for excessive lost workdays may be cigarette smoking. According to the U.S. Department of Health, Education & Welfare, for the nation as a whole there are now 77 million excess lost workdays associated with cigarette smoking each year. The Public Health Service defines excess days as those which would not have been lost if cigarette smokers had the same rates of illness as nonsmokers. These 77 million excess lost workdays represent almost 20% of the total annual work loss due to illness in the U. S. It was found that those of the nation's work force who smoke cigarettes spend over a third more time away from their jobs because of illness as do persons who have never smoked.

A recent National Health Survey showed that, in the survey year, there were 399 million workdays lost in the U. S. due to illness. A total of 19% of these were excess workdays because of the higher incidence of certain illnesses among cigarette smokers. The survey revealed that days of restricted activity—when a person cuts down on his usual output for as much as a day due to illness or injury—totaled 2369 million during the survey year. Excess days, days when cigarette smokers were not doing their best because they didn't "feel too good," were 13% of the total or 306 million. While it is admittedly difficult to hire only nonsmokers, perhaps a companywide effort to educate employees to the hazards of cigarette smoking would help cut down the growing trend toward greater absenteeism from smoking-related illnesses. While increasing productivity through fewer absences, management might be giving its employees the fringe benefit of a longer life in which to enjoy the fruits of their pensions.

A booklet, "The Facts About Smoking and Health," is available for distribution to workers at 10¢ a copy ($6.50 per 100) from U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.